

# What is CHLAMYDIA?

**Chlamydia** (pronounced *Kla-mid-ee-ah*) is a bacterial infection. People get chlamydia from having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with a person who's infected with this disease. Also, a mother can pass chlamydia onto her baby during childbirth.

Today, chlamydia is the most common reportable sexually-transmitted disease (STD) in the United States. An estimated 2.8 million Americans get chlamydia each year. Most are under the age of 25 and therefore all sexually active women under the age of 25 should be tested every year. Teenagers are especially likely to get this infection. It is important that all of your sex partners get treated, so that you do not become re-infected with chlamydia.

## HOW TO TELL If You Have Chlamydia

Chlamydia is known as a “silent” disease because most women and about half of men have no symptoms. Because of this, individuals may not seek treatment until the disease spreads and causes painful and permanent damage to sex and reproductive organs. Symptoms appear about one to four weeks after having sex with someone who has the disease. Symptoms may be so mild that they're not taken very seriously.

### Symptoms in Men

- ▶ Burning or frequent urination (peeing)
- ▶ A watery, white or light-yellow discharge (drip) from the penis
- ▶ Itching in the genital area
- ▶ Tender or swollen testicles (balls)

### Symptoms in Women

- ▶ Discharge from the vagina
- ▶ Bleeding between periods
- ▶ Painful intercourse (sex)
- ▶ Pain in the lower abdomen (stomach) or lower back
- ▶ A low-grade fever and nausea (sick to the stomach)

## WHAT CAN HAPPEN If You Don't Get Treatment

- ▶ For both men and women, chlamydia can cause infertility (i.e., being unable to have children). This is more likely to develop if treatment for chlamydia is delayed.
- ▶ In women, chlamydia can cause Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID). Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) is a general term that refers to infection of the uterus (womb), fallopian tubes (tubes that carry eggs from the ovaries to the uterus)
- ▶ If the tubes are damaged and the woman becomes pregnant, the egg might grow outside

the uterus (womb). This can be dangerous to the mother's life.

- ▶ A pregnant woman who has chlamydia can miscarry (i.e., lose the baby) in the first three months of pregnancy.
- ▶ During childbirth, a woman who has chlamydia can pass the disease to her baby. Many of these babies will suffer from eye infections, ear infections, or pneumonia. The baby may also be born under-weight.

## HOW TO FIND OUT If You Have Chlamydia

The only way you can know for sure if you have chlamydia is to visit a doctor or clinic and be tested for it. The physician/nurse may provide a genital exam and a lab test. Testing is usually quick, painless, and inexpensive. Here's how the test is done:

- ▶ For both men and women, a urine specimen may be collected or secretions can be collected from the throat and/or rectum; or
- ▶ For men, a thin swab is inserted into the open end of the penis. The swab soaks-up fluid present there for testing;
- ▶ For women, a swab is inserted into the vagina to remove fluids for testing.

## GETTING RID Of Chlamydia

Chlamydia is easily cured by taking antibiotics. A drug such as Azithromycin or Doxycycline is usually prescribed, although other medications may be used. For infants and pregnant women, Azithromycin or Erythromycin is usually prescribed. Penicillin is **no longer recommended** for chlamydia.

### Tips for successful treatment

- ▶ Follow the directions and take all of your medicine.
- ▶ Take all of the medicine given to you, even if the symptoms disappear!
- ▶ Have your sex partners get treated at the same time you are, otherwise you may re-infect each other.
- ▶ Have no sex for 7-10 days after completing your medication.
- ▶ Have a follow up exam 3-4 months after you finish your medicine.

## HOW TO REDUCE Your Chances Of Getting A STD

- ▶ Latex condoms (rubbers). Although condoms don't offer 100% protection, if **properly** used they may protect you from getting chlamydia and other STDs.
- ▶ Talk with your partner about using condoms. Using condoms every time you have sex is the best way to avoid most STDs.
- ▶ Spermicides like nonoxynol-9 do **NOT** prevent STD/HIV infections and should be used for pregnancy prevention **ONLY**.
- ▶ Keep a clear head. Alcohol and drugs affect the choices you make.
- ▶ Look for symptoms. If you or any of your sex partners have a discharge or sore, don't have sex until you're checked for a STD by a doctor or clinic.
- ▶ Talk to your partner about their sexual history and STD/HIV testing.

## AND FINALLY...

If you've been told that you have chlamydia, anyone you've had sex with in the last 60-days may also be infected. Remember, even if there are no symptoms, a person can still be infected. Getting early treatment is important!

If you feel uncomfortable about telling your sex partners about this, ask for help from the clinic where you were treated. They can provide information to the state health department and arrange for your partners to be told confidentially about their exposure to chlamydia. Your name will **never** be given to those partners.

For more information, call:  
**STD HOTLINE**  
**800-228-0254**